

## TEACH YOURSELF RAPANUI

By Petra Campbell

IN APRIL 2005, I BROUGHT ENRIQUE Tucki of CONAF from Easter Island to Australia for an environmental technical visit. Prior to his arrival I sent him an email, advising him that he had one little obligation to me when he got here; to transcribe the lyrics of my favorite Matato'a songs in Rapanui and translate them into English. I was sure he replied "no problem." Once in Australia, I excitedly produced the songs I wanted translated: at last I was *really* going to be able to "sing along." Enrique looked at me forlornly and said, "But I don't speak Rapanui." "What!" I exclaimed hugely astonished, "With a name like Tucki?" And so, headphones on my portable CD player, I was condemned to go on singing some nonsensical hybrid of Rapanui and gibberish, which probably sounds like a genuine foreign language to an Australian: "Oh you speak Maori", someone once told me.

I went on to lament to Enrique that before I left for Rapa Nui the first time, I had tried to find a language book with which to teach myself some basic Rapanui, but I couldn't find anything in Australia except the Easter Island Foundation's *Speak Rapanui* which they sent me from the U.S. While that was very helpful to get some basic phrases into my repertoire, Rapanui was an alien tongue to my portfolio of languages. I needed something more structured, preferably with a tape or CD so I could play it when driving or jogging, in a queue or washing up, while my children were tearing each other apart – and on the plane to Rapa Nui.

Enrique agreed. It was tragic. The reason he didn't speak Rapanui, he said, was because his father served in the army on the mainland where he met his Chilean wife. When Enrique was two, his father returned to Rapa Nui while Enrique and his Mum stayed in Chile. Enrique's parents now live happily together in Rapa Nui but that's not often the case today. Due to the narrowing of geographical distances between the mainland and Rapa Nui brought about by modern aviation, it is easier for separating couples to change locations than it was in the days of Enrique's parents when the majority of Rapa Nui still spoke their native tongue. Apart from the beaming of Spanish television into the homes of Rapanui, one aspect of language loss seemed to be caused by intermarriage: Chilean mothers, disenchanted after a while, take their children back to the mainland for better education and living conditions. Chilean mothers don't speak Rapanui on the whole and, in most cases, mothers are the closest to their babies in the formative years of a child's language development. Then there are fathers who also don't speak Rapanui; Chilean, foreign, and Rapanui. None can transmit Rapanui to their offspring.

I told Enrique about an article I read on the Rapa Nui Homepage by William R. Long and published in the *LA Times* stating, "...according to a 1992 study only 5% of Easter Island's school children spoke the Rapanui language, down from 70% in 1977". "You are such a statistic, Enrique!" I said sadly. That a whole language, one that has been spoken for millennia, should all but disappear in less than a generation took my breath away. Language is the soul of culture and

when the language dies the culture generally goes with it. The loss of cultural identity has translated itself among indigenous people all over the world into high levels of alcoholism and suicide. It is not hard to understand why, when it appears that there will never be a future in which they will again be the full masters of their land, resources, culture and their future, to the extent they once were, if at all. I hadn't been to Rapa Nui yet, but I had seen Kari Kari perform at the Palau Pacific Arts Festival in July 2004, and with the Municipality of Rapa Nui, I co-sponsored the late artist Maria Magdalena Tucki Pate to attend the Sydney Aboriginal and Oceanic Art Fair, also in 2004. These Rapa Nui cultural ambassadors possessed a passion for their culture that was infectious. From the outset I felt an urgency for the Rapanui language.

Once in Rapa Nui I understood Maria and Kari Kari. I too would fall under the spell of the island. I soon found out what efforts were being made to revive the Rapanui language. Six years ago, immersion courses were launched at the primary school. Rapa Nui residents, Nancy and Robert Weber, and other Chilean Academics on the mainland had done an immense amount of work documenting the language. However, there are still areas that could do with greater practical application. I was surprised, for instance, to read that the ambitious project called the "Knowledge Nest," a joint venture between UNESCO, the Distinguished Town Council, and the Ministry of Education, nowhere lists the strengthening, revival, or saving of the Rapanui language as an "expected outcome." Further creative approaches could also be useful in crèches and mothers' groups, with fathers who do speak Rapanui, and at the middle level for 2-4 year olds. Then what to do for the sizeable group of non-Rapanui speakers like Enrique who did not have the benefit of immersion classes?

Upon wide consultation with Rapanui across spectrums, I decided to produce "Teach Yourself Rapanui," a practical language book with CD's. I had learnt a few languages by this method and believed that such a book would bridge the gap between the immersion classes taught at school and the in-depth language studies produced by eminent academics. It would be a non-exhaustive approach to learning Rapanui for those Rapanui who have lost their language; Chileans and foreigners married or partnered to a Rapanui; and foreigners working or studying in Rapa Nui, or just passing through. The dialogues would be culturally relevant with conversations you would find yourself using on Rapa Nui. It would contain plenty of variety and recordings; even a popular song to learn at the end of each chapter which will also give insight into what is important to Rapanui today and how closely tied their often metaphoric language is to the movement of nature, their history and their culture.

In order to demonstrate the structure and effectiveness of the book, I wrote the first four chapters myself with all the language resources I could find. When I couldn't go any further, I set about looking for a partner; preferably someone who lived in Sydney. I soon discovered there is only one Rapanui living in Sydney and he is often on film shoots out of Sydney. The next closest Rapanui to me was in New Zealand but he was too busy with his own business; such a book is hugely time-consuming and a big ask of anyone.

"Yes," said Enrique, back in Australia, "This is a problem," but this is a very beautiful project and an important one; we need one in Spanish, too. I need this book, so does my daughter. I'll try and find you someone."

When Enrique returned to Rapa Nui I received an email from his cousin Patricia Riroroko Laharoa. Patricia is a teacher at the primary school and she was willing to give up her time to write this book with me. So we began. We have done the bones of eight chapters now. We spent Christmas and New Years 2006 almost daily, developing the dialogues in the book and doing test recordings. Many women came in from the language department and elsewhere to contribute to the conversations we designed and assist with accuracy of the translations, explanations and grammar.

There will be both a Spanish and an English version. The final product will go through the fine toothcomb of language/culture specialists on the island before going to print. We have established deadlines so that it does not become a dusty relic on that mighty unfinished-project shelf. Patricia and I have thus far donated our time, working around our usual professions, as has everyone else. But the project now requires funding to meet deadlines.

If you wish to be a supporter of this project - along with the Easter Island Foundation - your donation will be acknowledged, and will also be noted with gratitude in the preface. Please address any support to the Easter Island Foundation, PO Box 6774, Los Osos, CA 93412, and specify that it is for Petra's Rapanui Language Project. *Maururu*.

## CONFERENCES

A FORUM TITLED "Politics and Sovereignty: Colonial Legacies in Oceania," sponsored by the Center for the Americas, Wesleyan University, Connecticut, will be held on Friday, 29 September 2006, at the Mansfield Freeman Center of East Asian Studies. One of the featured presentations will be "Self Determination or Integration? The Uneasy Relationship between Rapa Nui and Chile" by Riet Delsing, Ph.D. Candidate, University of California, Santa Cruz.

THE PACIFIC ARTS ASSOCIATION IXth International Symposium will take place at the Quai Branly Museum in Paris, France, from July 5-8, 2007. Special events and tours are planned for July 2-4, 2007.

Many museums today are being rebuilt or redesigned, reflecting current philosophy and approaches to Oceanic art. Areas of discussion include histories of collections and the role of indigenous Pacific artists and scholars.

The local organizing committee in Paris includes Phillipe Peltier, Yves Le Fur, and Magali Melandri. For information: <http://www.pacificarts.org>

## EIF NEWS

### THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

AT THE MEETING OF THE BOARD of the Easter Island Foundation in April 2006, Christopher Stevenson turned over the reigns of the presidency after completing two 2-year terms. The Board thanked Chris for his leadership for the past several years. He is not gone, however, he will still serve as Vice President for International Conferences. Kay Kenady Sanger is our new 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President. Joan Seaver Kurze accepted the position as Secretary for the Foundation, and Frank Morin continues as Treasurer.

The Board sadly accepted the resignation of Alan Drake who has been a dedicated member for many years and was Webmaster for the EIF webpage ([islandheritage.org](http://islandheritage.org)). Ann Altman and Shawn McLaughlin also left the Board. Shawn, another significant contributor and author of *The Complete Guide to Easter Island*, is now in the process of revising his book and we were all very pleased when the playwright Edward Albee described his visit to Easter Island in the Sunday Travel section of the *New York Times* and gave Shawn's book a very favorable mention.

The EIF has always considered its scholarship program to be one of its major functions, and this year we decided to increase the amounts of our scholarship awards. The scholarship award recipients for 2006 were announced and the lucky, and worthy, winners are:

- Daniela Macarena Araki Gonzales, (Nicolas Haoa Sr. Award). Daniela is in her second year studying early childhood education.
- Antonio Fernando Munoz Tuki, (EIF Scholarship). Antonio is a second-year law student.
- Tiare Aguilera Hey, (EIF Director's Award). Tiare is a third-year law student.
- Ioan Soler Hotu, (Weigand Award). This is Ioan's third year as a Weigand recipient.
- Juana Luna Atamu, (Weigand Award). This is Juana's second year as a Weigand recipient.

The EIF congratulates all of the scholarship recipients and wishes them well as they go forward in their academic careers.

In addition to the scholarship awards, several grants were given to graduate students to assist them with research projects and fieldwork. The projects involved subject matter as varied as creating a database of skeletal materials and associated DNA for the Museo Antropológico Sebastián Englert (Peter Ragen, St Mary's College, Maryland); supporting Earthwatch fieldwork at the La Pérouse area (Mara Mulrooney, a graduate student from University of Auckland); dating pollen sediment from Rano Kau (Candace Gossen, a graduate student at the University of Oregon); to creating a series of CDs to preserve and assist in learning the Rapanui language (Petra Campbell, Australia).

In addition, the EIF expanded its scope of supported projects by providing assistance for the construction and in-